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Parent of golden dreams, Romance -
Lord Byron -

The author of 'Waverley' has for the last three years gratified the public taste by several productions which have been received (and this is their peculiar boast) by the best informed and most enlightened part of the community, with more eagerness and read with greater avidity, than any other novelists productions, since Mrs. Radcliff wrote.

By mentioning this Lady's name however, we by no means intend to institute a comparison, between her romances and the tales of

which we speak. It could have no just formulation from the different nature of the works of the composers. The latter are unique, the author is at home in his descriptions - his plots also are peculiar - Nor has he any ghosts to terrify, or any mysteries to unravel. No comparison however could eventuate in favour of the female romancer. She has an imagination of an inferior order - she has it wander in countries which she knew only from description. We speak not in her disfavour however, for she has the high credit of being the first - in point of time, generally of power, among the novelmongers of ra day.

So singular are the productions of our modern anonymous author, in costume, in fable and in effect, that we do not attempt the present investigation, without feelings of conscious inability - perhaps of presumption - For their works rank higher than common novels, - from their connection with history, from their apparent accuracy of local description - from the brilliant imagination the authors displays - from their power of exciting interest - in fine, from the nameless something, the Sais je ne sçais quoi, (which can certainly be better expressed in English) which breathes through the whole.

To search out this secret talisman which captivates the reader's attention and enquire what it is which so arrests the mind and keeps the eye of ennui from closing, when it glances over our author's pages is the object of the present essay.

The subjects of his novels have generally historical fact for their basis - or they are so connected with events that have transpired that they wear the semblance of Truth. 'Waverley' and 'Old Mortality' narrate recorded events. 'Guy Mannering', 'The Antiquary' and the 'Black Dwarf' are wrought from the popular customs and superstitions of Scotland in the several stages of its refinement. It has been indeed made a question whether Truth is as interesting as Fiction. The depravity of nature and the baldness of downright facts are all the evidences that can be urged in favour of such a system. But the former is a wild speculation that all wild speculators from the puritanical enthusiast down to the inventor of patent suspenders lay hold of as their sheet-anchor. Their own consciousness indeed bears them out in their theory - but they make their premises what should be the conclusion. The second argument, the nakedness of truth, is but granting

the novelist his data;- for it is his province to clothe that goddess, sometimes severe, in her most captivating apparel. But why compute these crudities? The "Scottish Chiefs" "Thaddeus of Warsaw" "Don Sebastian" "The Pastor's Fire Side" and more which we might enumerate, but above all the exquisite unique of our author are testimonies which overwhelm all skepticism.

Romance is History in miniature. And of course the petty feuds of peculiar countries are more calculated for its genius and effects than the wars of mighty nations. In the former private interests became of higher importance and the privates in the ranks of romance are even the most interesting personages. To make a monarch excite our attention, he must be degraded from his dignity. And never were finer scenes spread before the longing eyes of the novelist, than the dark mountains and shadowy glens of the Highlanders. The roar of their cataracts is melody to his ear their tartaned wanderers are a host of heroes. The individuality of Interest, lost in the ocean of general history, but which is the soul and essence of Romance, is wrought to its greatest tension and preserved the longest in the story of their clans' divisions or of

their Border Feuds. We will not multiply Remarks which must be familiar to every reader, but which are necessary in the conduct of our enquiry.

The costume of these tales is peculiarly attractive. In the description of scenery, the care the proportion, the well defined lines of our author proclaim that he is at home. But the great charm, which strangers can faintly enjoy, but which renders his rugged country so dear to the bard and romancer is the connexion between tradition and scenery. Every knoll has its brownie, every dark torrent its legend. Antiquity renders their stories more important and a wild fancy catching its inspirations from the terrific grandeur of some parts of the country, the desolation of others contrasted with neighbouring beauty, makes their legends unspeakably entrancing. They are so to readers who are separated from their rocks and pine clad mountains by the vast barrier of the Atlantic - what must they be to those who were born among the scenes of the tradition and nurtured beneath their influence - who imbibed a belief in them with their mothers milk and bonded for them as they would for their altars their children and their country? Language is

cold, that speaks of them, without their inspiration - description that covers its traditions from Scotia is as lifeless as the portrait of a corpse. We read the marvellous narrations of Chivalry, but soon grew tired of their absurdity. The legendary tales of Scotland are full as wild, but they carry with them so much appearance of probability they are so founded in national and individual belief that we never pause to smile at their incongruities - we are hurried on by the afflatus divine which breathes its fire and its energy throughout.

The author has used these materials cautiously - but has admirably calculated effect, even with mathematical precision. He has blended them with his accounts of society and the conduct of his fable, and made his machinery subservient to the development of the fable; - but it is such machinery as is most interesting and least startling to credulity. In an Epic the Gods of Homer and Virgil are generally the least interesting characters of the plot - and the reason is obvious; - they are sure to come off safe; - They can extricate themselves in a twinkling from the most hairbreadth perils - but for those characters of our author who have somewhat of a supernatural agency, our sympathy is

called forth to its most lively extent - and terror and fear, pity and expectation are ever awake, ever attendant on the issue of the exigency - we recollect but three instances in our authors tales, where any supernatural warnings and fulfilments take place, which are left unaccounted for by natural reason. The first is the second sighted seer's prophecy of the death of Colonel Gardiner in Waverley; - The second is the calculation of Bertram's destiny by Guy Mannering together with the concurrent spinnings and weavings and threats of the gypsey; - the third is the appearance of ~~Mysterious~~ Meg Merrilees immediately after Claverhouse's wish to die in the arms of victory, summoning him to appear before the throne of God. We may remark here again, by way of commentary, that the prophecies of such events most interest - the end of which is uncertainty. we have something to fear and something to expect - we tremble for characters we admire but do not forestall their doom before its consummation - which must be the case whenever supernatural agents, for whom we have no concern make any immediate revelation from heaven.

The next general feature in the colouring of these romances is the abundant use of the Scotish dialect. This is at first a little troublesome to some readers. when we seek amusement simply the mind dislikes any labour. But the idiom soon grows familiar, it completes the identity of the characters, stamps the consistency of the narrations and completes the deception of intellect. It is admirably calculated for displaying the intuitive keenness and untaught wit of the lower orders of the dramatis personæ and to it, or we are much mistaken, we are indebted for much of the satisfaction we have derived from the perusal of these volumes.

We come now to the particular plots of these stories. We may remark of them, that they are all strikingly similar in their parts, and different in the management and winding up. It is as if a company of the same set of theatrical performers on the same stage enacting different dramas. But our author's fables are all original and unique. An enumeration of the dramatis personæ will best develop their nature and confirm our first remark on this topic.

The heros then — or those who are the heroes of other romances and must be considered so here, seeing that they are in love, are.

the persons to whose adventures the incidents are subservient and in whose favour they are finally wrought- the heroes in our authors stories have generally few peculiarities and are alike in the prominent traits of their character. They are decent, civil spoken young gentlemen, well informed, brave,- and what heros generally are- For instance, is there any very great difference in the complexion of disposition in Waverley, Lovel or Earnscliff? They are the same actors;- the tones of their voice, their gestures are the same;- but they are differently appareled and their adventures being different throw around their characters a shades of difference. We might say the same of Bertram and Morton- although they are more prominent figures in the picture. But Bertram does not appear until late in the first volume of Guy Mannering- and, we can hardly tell why- he is not a remarkably interesting personage. Again, there is an obvious resemblance in the very contingencies that call out the energies of the nature of all the heroes. These are ever of the militant order- Waverley and Morton get into difficulties by engaging in the hopes and fears of a party who are at war with

the powers that be. The latter is involved in the concerns of his heart, and stunned by his mistress in consequence of this dereliction. So Lovel is reproved by the fair Isabella, for leaving the profession of arms in clinging to a hopeless attachment. Bertram grands with his commander, the father of Julia — and Earnscliff is opposed to the sire of his beloved in his political sentiments. Waverley and Morton are finally extricated from the same dilemma by similar means.

Still less variation do we find among the heroines of an author — with the exception of Flora Mc Ivor. A reader generally forms some idea of the person of the character when moral picture is drawn by the literary painter, when he gives no particular account of her physical appearance. At least, we presume so, from experience of our own. Nay, we have formed precisely the same idea of the heroines of these tales — the same image has uniformly floated in our imagination, without being sufficiently defined to admit of verbal description. Julia Mannering, Isabella Wardour, Isabella Vere, Edith Bellenden — have all the same nature and each acts as her fellow heroine would have acted, had she been placed in a similar

situation. we forget at present and cannot immediately inform ourselves of the fact, whether the author describes their persons and physiognomies — but they probably had dark and sparkling eyes and were formed on the Grecian model. They are all of course beautiful — and possess that sort of beauty which the modern amateurs designate by the vague epithet of elegant — they have in a high degree the soul of female modesty, with much dignity withal — much sagacity and intellect.

Next in order come the guardians of fairies. These, with our author have each some distinguishing characteristic — are always conveniently in the way — and are finally reconciled to the match. The sternness of Colonel Mannering superinduced on the buoyancy of youth by the toils of a military life and its exquisite sensibility to the grades of subordination — and accerbated by domestic misfortune — the dastard pride and pretensions to profundity in Sir Hector Maclean, with his religious scrupulosity for the character of Michael Misticot, alias Misbegot — The foolish ambition of Miss Vere's father — and the family pride of Lady Margaret Bellenden, with her reverence for the arm chair or throne in which his Majesty Charles Second was pleased to take his

dejeuné at Tillietudlem — are all admira-
bly supported by the author, with sufficient
sameness to detect the similitude and suffi-
cient variety never to weary attention —

We are now to notice the characters of
our author which are entirely his own — on
which he probably used most labour and which
have gained him no ordinary reputation. They
are the machinery of which we have spoken,
contribute in no common measure to wind up
the plot, move in mystery and excite most
interest. Meg Merrilies is certainly as impor-
tant a personage if not more so than any other
in the scene of these novels — Her figure is de-
scribed with perfect nicety, and the develope-
ment of the catastrophe is her province. Par-
ticular accounts and extracts belong to the de-
partment of the Reviewers — which we have
no desire of usurping. For such expansions the
limits of our paper are too contracted; and it
is inconsistent with the plan of the present
number — We shall therefore only remark, that
Edie Ochiltree for the Antiquary is the coun-
terpart of the witch or gypsey, with her other
less delicate aliases — The old gaberlunzie
is a masterly and finished picture, and if it
is not considered equal to that of Meg Meri-

:lies, it is not because of its being less true to nature - but because it was drawn afterwards by which it perhaps lost something of its orig:inality - because the energies displayed in both characters are more striking in the female and because the plot of the Antiquary is less interesting. The black dwarf is the third character of this nature drawn by our author. His is the least finished performance of the three;- the tale is too short to exhibit the sepa:rate particularities of his nature and this me:thod of development, our novelist is uncommon:ly happy. He wearies us by no tedious descrip:tions. His incidents throw light on the dispo:sitions of the actors;- and we acquire our concep:tions of their several parts and the masterly hand of him who creates them in the least laborious and most delightful mode. But the Black Dwarf is the least interesting personage from other causes - from the deformity of his body and the moroseness of his temper, as well as from the remoteness of such a character from nature.

In the wide range of actors in these works yet remaining unclassified and unnotic:ed, we must presume on enquiring no further at

The plan of arranging in parallels, which we have hitherto pursued would branch out into too many divisions. The author has his clowns or idiots, half knaves and half fools, such as in Waverley - and Gerse Gibbie in "Old mortality" - his sturdy, honest, intelligent country men - as Dandie Dinmont, the fisherman, Hobbie Elliot and Caddie - admirably described to the life. The general stamp of these characters is however one, as we have it: marked of the rest; - But we think that they have a perspicuous individuality, which the heroes want, who are like the heroes of most tales of romance.

But we must separate from others three individuals who stand in the fore-ground of three of the Romances, best defined, (except the agents in the machinery) and whom we cannot properly omit. The gallant, intrepid, haughty Fergus Mc Ivor - The erudite, good humoured facetious, stingy Antiquary - the dark, fanatical Balfour of Burley - lead captive the attention and command the Interest. They are all highly wrought; - but in our opinion, the second is better finished than any character we ever met with, in all the wildness or chaster flights of fiction.

With these three exceptions, perhaps the only ones that can be found, we think the view we have taken of the dramatis personæ will bear us out in our first remarks on the plot of our author's fables. We do not think that the bare skeletons of these plots in any other hand or in any other country could have produced romances which in point of interest would bear any comparison with his. It is the beauty of particular scenes, the exquisite and consistent costume of the whole, which constitutes the magic of its charm. Waverley is an eminent instance of this. The Love plot of that story is very lamentable. In fact Waverley's heart appears to be of a very temperate nature. It never sinks below the freezing point or rises above blood heat. We like novelty – but there is such a thing as overstepping the modesty of Romance. One of its canons which is grounded on immemorial usage is, that the knight must be faithful to his mistress. He must either be wedded to her in the catastrophe, or must die in combat or of despair and though such consummations may exist in Romance alone – the writer who would captivate

must abide by the rule. In contravening it the author of Waverley resembles "The Lord of the Isles" the least interesting in point of plot, of all Mr Scott's productions - Indeed the resemblance in every respect between the works of these two authors is so great, that the works of the anonymous writer are precisely what we should expect to find the prose romances of Scott - and vice versa.

The great secret which has gained this modern master his laurels - which established the fame of far greater men - even the immortal Homer and innumerable others, too often neglected, but ever as successful in literature as in common life, is unquestionably, that the author is at home -

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